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RAMAYANA

FOR SCHOOLS

523

BY

S. B. BANERJEA

Author of

"Indian Tales," "Tales of Bengal," Etc.

E. M. GOPALAKRISHNA KONE.

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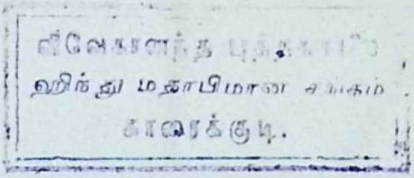

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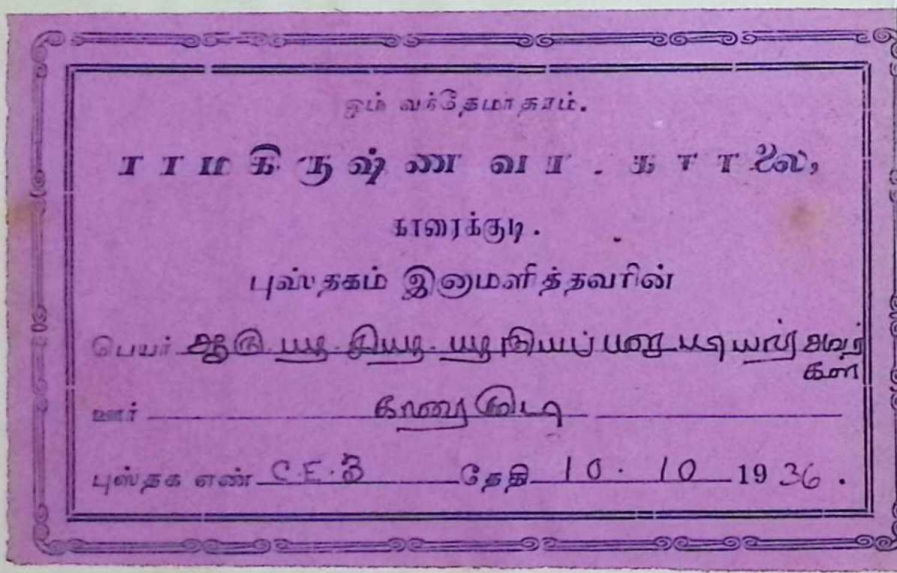

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RAMAYAN

CHAPTER I.

ONCE upon a time, Ayodhya was ruled by a King, named Dasaratha.

Dasaratha was born in the solar race, which was founded by Mandhata. It had a long line of illustrious rulers, such as Bharat, Harischandra, Bhagiratha, who was reputed to have brought Gunga (Ganges) from the heavens to this earth, Raghu, and Aja.

At a very early age, Dasaratha ascended the throne of Ayodhya. He married three wives, Kausalya, Kaikeyi and Sumitra. For a long time, he neglected the affairs of his State and passed most of his time in the inner apartments of his palace. The result was that there was famine in the land, and the sorrows of his subjects knew no bounds. He, however, soon learnt how things stood and performed a

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"jagna" by which the land was again filled with plenty.

One day, Dasaratha went out to hunt and, by accident, killed Sindhu, the only son of a hermit, named Andha. For this offence, Andha cursed him saying that he would die of grief for separation from his son, just as he was about to die for sorrow at the death of his only son; and this curse was fulfilled in a remarkable manner some time later.

Shortly after, Dasaratha had to wage war with a giant, named Sambara. He was wounded in the fight, but his queen, Kaikeyi, was able to cure his wound and, in his gratitude, he told her she might ask any boon she desired. This, she said, she would do later on.

Now, Dasaratha was growing old, but had not yet been blessed with a son. So, on the advice of his ministers and spiritual guide, he performed a "jagna" on a grand scale. His faith was rewarded, for, in due course, each of his wives gave birth to a son. Ram was the child of Kausalya,

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Bharat of Kaikeyi, while Sumitra gave birth to twins, Laksman and Satrughna.

The princes were carefully educated in all the arts and sciences and taught the use of weapons. Within a short time, they mastered them all, to the great joy of their parents and friends.

Now, King Janaka ruled a State adjoining Dasaratha's. To him was born a girl, named Sita. When she came of age, her father resolved to celebrate her marriage. To win her hand, hundreds of princes from different parts of India flocked to his palace. Now, Janaka had sworn that he would give his daughter in marriage to the man who should be able to fit an arrow to the bow of Hara (Shiva). All the assembled princes tried to do so, but failed, and had to retire crestfallen. Ram, who had heard of the contest, presented himself, in his turn, at the court of Janaka, accompanied by his brothers. He alone was able to fulfil the condition imposed by Janaka and drew the bow, to the astonishment of all the onlookers. So he was married to Sita, with

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much pomp and ceremony. His brothers too were married to other princes at the same time.

Dasaratha had now got all that he wanted and his joy was complete. There was peace in the land and all his subjects were happy and contented.

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CHAPTER II.

WHEN Dasaratha felt that he had become too old to govern, he decided to resign the crown and hand over the reins of government to his eldest son, Ram. He consulted his ministers and wives, who all agreed that Ram was a fit successor to his throne. He began to make all preparations for the investiture of Ram. Invitations were sent out to all Kings and Princes to attend the ceremony. The time drew near and all was ready; but, on the day, previous to the ceremony, a strange thing occurred.

Kaikeyi had a hunch-backed woman for her companion, named Manthara, who did not like the idea of the stepson of her mistress become King. Seizing a favourable moment, she spoke to Kaikeyi and poisoned her ears against Ram, pointing an imaginary picture of the wretched life that Kaikeyi and her son would lead, should Ram become King. At first, the

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queen would not listen to her words; but she was at length won over. Even then she was at a loss to find a way of preventing the investiture of Ram and sought Manthara's advice. Manthara said:—

"You may remember that, some time ago, the King promised to grant you a boon. All that you need do is to ask him to fulfil his promise."

"How?" enquired Kaikeyi in wonder.

"Simply tell him," Manthara explained, "that you seek two favours. First, that Ram should be sent to the forest for fourteen years; and secondly, that your son should be invested King of Ayodhya. The King is true to his words. He will not refuse the boons you ask of him."

When Kaikeyi next met her lord, she spoke to him as she had been advised to do by Manthara. When he heard her requests he was filled with surprise and grief. He tried his utmost to induce her to change her mind and ask some other favour, but she would not listen. At last,

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most unwillingly and with a heavy heart, he promised to grant her prayers. Soon everybody heard of what had happened and spoke ill of Kaikeyi, who, however, was well satisfied with her work. She sent for her son and told him the good news she had for him. But he was pained to hear it and rebuked her sharply for her wickedness.

Ram too heard what his stepmother had done. But he was not pained. Rather, he felt glad that his father had kept his promise to Kaikeyi. He soon went to pay his respects to her and told her that he would obey her orders, expressing pleasure at the prospect of Bharat's becoming King.

Laksman would not, however, allow Ram to go alone in exile. He begged to be allowed to accompany him. Sita made the same request. Ram tried to dissuade them ; but when he found that they would not listen to him, he was reluctantly forced to grant their request.

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So, next day, Ram, Sita and, Laksman dressed themselves in the clothes of hermits and left the palace amidst universal lamentation. Thousands followed them, but were persuaded to return to their houses.

Dasaratha did not long survive the exile of his son. Through mourning for him constantly, Dasaratha fell into serious illness, to which he succumbed shortly after. Thus was fulfilled the curse of Andha, the hermit, made many years before.

After his father's death, Bharat, accompanied by his ministers, went to the forest, where Ram was living, to fetch him back, so that, he might perform their father's sradh ceremony and ascend the throne. Ram refused to return, saying that he was bound to obey his father's order and gave Bharat authority to perform the sradh ceremony in a fitting manner. He gave his brother much good advice regarding the manner in which he should govern the country. Bharat

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begged him to let him have a pair of sandals, which he would put on the throne and so govern the country in his name. Ram consented to this and Bharat, putting the sandals reverentially on his head, returned home, with a mournful heart.

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CHAPTER III.

AFTER Bharat's departure, Ram, Sita, and Laksman went to the Chitrakoot hill and resolved to stay there. The hermits, who lived on that hill, came to him and complained that the Rakhasas were giving them such trouble that they had decided to remove elsewhere. Ram did not stop there long; and, one day, accompanied by his wife and brother, he proceeded onwards.

By and by, they came to the hermitage of Atri, where the sage and his wife received them cordially, but advised them to go to Dandakaranya, as this place was infested with giants.

So they continued their journey and, in time, reached Dandakaranya. They were charmed with its scenery and decided to stop there.

While they were walking about a ferocious-looking giant, named Biradh, suddenly appeared before them and was

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going to eat them up, when, Ram, at the suggestion of his brother, killed him with an arrow.

Ram changed his mind and resolved to go forward again. So the three walked on and soon reached the hermitage of Sarabhanga, which stood on the Gomati. The sage was gratified to see Ram, and, after presenting him with Indra's bow and arrows, lighted a fire and burned himself to death. He had longed to see Ram and now that his desire was fulfilled, he wanted nothing more and so killed himself.

For ten years, then, Ram, Sita, and Laksman wandered from forest to forest. They lived on fruits and roots and passed their days happily.

One day, Sita expressed a wish to pay a visit to the hermitage of Agastya. So, soon afterwards, the two brothers and Sita left for his abode and, in a little time, reached it. The hermit welcomed and entertained them hospitably. He advised them to go to the forest of Panchavati and live there.

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Accordingly, they left the hermitage and went to Panchavati, where they built a hut to live in. There they lived happily, often enjoying the companionship of the hermits of the forest.

One day, a strange thing happened. Ravan, the King of Lanka, had a sister, named Surpanakha. She happened to come to the forest, where she saw Ram and, at once, fell in love with him. She considered long how she might attract his attention and decided to present herself before him in her natural human form.

She saluted Ram and enquired who he and his companions were. Ram was frank and open-hearted. He told his story and asked who she was and what she wanted.

Surpanakha told him who she was and confessed her love for him. She dilated upon her beauty, spoke ill of Sita's beauty, and requested him to marry her. She added that if he would not listen to her request, she would do away with Sita, thus removing the obstacle in her path.

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Ram laughingly suggested that she should make love to Laksman, who was very beautiful.

Surpanakha spoke out his mind to Laksman, who refused to comply with her request. At this, she came to Ram and attempted to do away with Sita. Ram, seeing that matters had gone too far, made a sign to his brother, who, thereupon, cut off Surpanakha's nose.

Howling with pain, Surpanakha ran to her brother and showed her disfigured nose. Ravan's anger was roused, and he ordered some of his captains to kill the two brothers.

The captains went well-armed, but met with a stubborn resistance from the brothers, who slew them all. Whereat, Surpanakha, becoming frightened, went to her brothers, Khar and Dusana, who bade her take courage and promised to rid her of her enemies. But they met with no better success. Though they fought hard, they were killed by the two brothers.

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Surpanakha's fears now knew no bounds. She ran to her brother, Ravan, and told him all that had happened. She described Sita's beauty and urged him to abduct her and make her his queen. Charmed with her description, he resolved to bring Sita to his palace at any cost.

So he ordered his charioteer, Marich, to get his "Pushpakratha" ready. Some people say that his "ratha" (chariot) was a flying machine; others that it was a swift-running chariot. Whatever it was, it was on this "ratha" that Ravan came to the place where the exiles dwelt.

On the way, Marich, who had learnt his master's intention, urged him to give it up. In vain he pointed out the peril that would result. So far from being favourably heard, he was chastised for his advice. Marich heaved a sigh of despair, for he foresaw that the abduction of Sita would bring about the destruction of Lanka and its inhabitants. But he had perforce to hold his peace.

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Reaching Panchavati, Ravan asked Marich to assume the form of a golden-horned deer. This Marich did.

This deer walked on slowly and, by and by, came to the spot, where Ram and Sita sat. Sita requested her lord to kill the deer that she might have its skin.

Ram spoke to Laksman about her wish. Laksman, looking at the deer keenly, felt sure it was a Rakshasa in disguise, who had come with some bad motive. He told his brother his thought. Ram, did not agree, himself went to kill the deer, asking him to protect Sita until his return.

The deer felt that it was doomed. It did not run away; but when Ram seized it by its horns, it suddenly assumed its former appearance and cried piteously:—

"Laksman, come here at once and save me. I have been attacked by a Rakshasa."

"Marich had imitated Ram's voice so exactly that Sita was misled and thought

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that her husband had fallen into some danger. She asked Laksman to hurry to his assistance. Laksman said that there was no cause for fear, as Ram was quite able to defend himself. At this she was filled with anger and used some hot words, which stung him to the quick. He did not, however, remonstrate, but after saluting her, ran to his brother's assistance.

Hitherto Ravan had remained hidden nearby. Observing that the two brothers were away and that Sita was alone in her hut, he disguised himself as a hermit and presented himself at the door. He enquired who she was. She told him all about herself and her husband. He then begged for alms. She had hardly produced her dole, when he seized her hands, told her who he was, and offered to make her his principal Queen. He painted a picture of the happy life she would lead with him. At this she grew angry, and chastised him for his impudence. Finding that she rejected him, he seized her, thrust her into his chariot, and drove away.

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Sita filled the air with lamentation. Her cry attracted the attention of Jatayu, the king of birds, who ran to her assistance. He fought with Ravan bravely, but was defeated.

Ravan sped on and, at length, reached his palace. There he made another attempt to induce Sita to become his queen, but she rejected all his offers with scorn. On this, he confined her in the "Asokaban" and placed guards over her.

Sita had the greatest faith in her lord and felt that, some day, he would come and release her from her imprisonment.

When Ram came back after slaying the deer, he could not find Sita, and when his brother joined him, they searched for her everywhere without success. Then walking on, they came to the spot where Jatayu lay writhing in agony. From him they learnt Sita's fate. The bird died a little while after. The brothers performed his last rites and proceeding on their journey, came to the dwelling place of Kabandha, a giant. They sought his

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advice and were told to go to Rishyamukha, where Sugrib, the king of monkeys, who would be able to render them every assistance lived.

The brothers soon left the place and went to Rishyamukha with a sorrowful heart.

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CHAPTER IV.

WHEN the monkeys saw the brothers, they, at first, thought them to be spies. After holding consultation, they decided to send Hanuman, the minister of Sugrib, to make enquiries.

Hanuman introduced himself to the brothers and asked who they were. He learnt their story and requested them to see his lord and promised help on his behalf.

Sugrib received the brothers cordially and heard their story. Hanuman presently lighted a fire and in presence of "Agnideva" (god of fire), Sugrib established friendship with Ram and Laksman.

By and by, Sugrib told Ram what he knew of Sita's abduction and promised to do all in his power to secure her release.

Now, Sugrib had a sorrow of his own, which he, in turn, confided to Ram. He had an elder brother, named Bali. On the death of his father, Bali ascended the

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throne. After some time he was attacked by two giants with whom he fought valiantly. They entered a cave for protection, into which Bali followed them. But, for more than a year, no news was heard of him. It was concluded that he had been killed. So the people made Sugrib their King. The latter performed his brother's sradh and ascended the throne. He had not ruled long, however, when, one day, Bali suddenly appeared. It was learnt that he had killed the giants—news, which pleased all. When Bali found that Sugrib had become King, he was beside himself with rage. He abused his brother and turned him out of the palace. Since then, Sugrib had been living on Rishyamukha with certain trusted followers.

The two brothers listened to his story attentively. Ram advised him to fight with Bali, promising to render him every help in his power.

Thus encouraged, Sugrib attacked Bali, but was defeated and had to beat a hasty retreat. When Ram heard of this,

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he bade him take courage and promised that he would himself rid him of his enemy.

Bali soon heard of Ram's promise; but though well aware of the latter's prowess, he resolved to fight with him. His wife, Tara, also heard of the matter and repeatedly begged her lord not to fight with Ram and to make peace with Sugrib by sharing the throne with him. Bali would not listen to this advice.

After a while, Bali attacked his brother and wounded him badly. He then attacked Ram, but was himself mortally wounded.

While he lay writhing in agony, Ram came near him. Seeing him, Bali addressed him thus:—

"Oh Ram, I never injured you in any way. Why then did you attack me? I know what your present mission is. Had you sought my help, I could have secured the release of Sita within a short time and punished the wicked king of Lankha. You

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have not acted as a true Kshatriya should."

"I have sworn to befriend Sugrib," Ram said. "I shall see that he has no enemy anywhere on earth. I am bound to keep my promise. I need say no more."

Tara soon heard of the fate of her lord. She hurried to the place where he lay dead and cold. She saw Ram there and rebuked him for making her a widow and cursed him saying that as he had given her pain, so should he, in turn, suffer pain on account of Sita for ever. This curse, as we shall see, was fulfilled later.

Sugrib performed the sradh of his brother in a fitting manner and ascended his throne. He requested Ram and Lakshman to live with him. They reminded him of their father's order, and went to a hill nearby, where they built for themselves a hut.

Having become a king, Sugrib forgot his promise to Ram. Several months passed away, but nothing was done to secure the release of Sita.

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One day, Ram sent his brother to Sugrib to remind him of his promise. Now, Sugrib feared Ravan and dared not fight with him. Hanuman, however, reminded him that he owed all to Ram and must fulfil his promise, which he had made before fire.

Sugrib felt ashamed and hastened to pay respect to Laksman. The latter rebuked him for his indifference and reminded him of his duty. Sugrib begged pardon for his fault and swore that he would not rest content till he had secured the release of Sita.

No one, however, knew where Sita was imprisoned. So Sugrib sent his courtiers in all directions to find her. They searched high and low, but in vain. They all returned and reported their ill-success to their king.

Sugrib, having held a consultation with his ministers, decided to proceed southwards. Hanuman with several companions also went out in search of Sita. On his way, he met Sampati, a brother of Jatayu,

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the King of birds, and learnt from him that Sita had been carried off to Lanka. He had seen her in confinement in "Asoka-ban". She was well guarded, and to secure her release would be no easy task.

Merely to visit Lanka was difficult. A sea had to be crossed. Sampati told the monkeys not to lose heart. He had grown old and infirm; otherwise he himself would have taken them to Lanka on his wings. But his son was young and robust and was expected every moment. He would carry them all to Lanka.

While they sat talking, Suparsa, the son of Sampati, came to the place. At his father's request he carried Hanuman to Lanka. Leaving him there, he flew away and joined his father. The thought, that he had been of service to Ram, filled him with joy. He sought no reward, but considered himself blessed.

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CHAPTER V.

As he came near Lanka, Hanuman began to think over his plan of action. Suddenly, Surasa, a huge serpent, came across his path. He managed, somehow to escape from its clutches. He fell into other dangers on the way, but was able to overcome them all.

After a time Hanuman entered the capital city. Its palaces and other beautiful sights filled him with amazement. He feasted his eyes on them for some time and then began to think how he might enter the "Asokaban", where Sita was confined. He quickly disguised himself and entered Ravan's palace. After long and careful search,he found Sita's place of confinement. He saw her very thin and pale. Her eyes were swollen through constant weeping, and she was frequently sighing for Ram. At this, Hanuman could not restrain his tears. He did not, however, dare to introduce himself, as it was daytime, and her

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guards were moving about. He hid himself in a certain place and waited for the night to come.

At night he saw Ravan coming to "Asokaban" accompanied by hundreds of women of his palace. Presently he addressed Sita thus:—

"Devi, Ravan never bows his head to anybody. But he has bowed his head to you alone. Why sigh for a man, whose days are numbered, and who is very poor? I believe he has already been eaten up by some giant. Be pleased to become my queen, and you will be the mistress of all I possess."

Hearing this, Sita rebuked him sharply and said:—

"Ram is my all in all. You do not know his prowess. You all will die at his hands. I advise you to make friends with him by restoring me to him. He is my lord, my god."

Ravan said:—

"When I brought you here, I promised to give you one year's time in which to

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think after my proposal. Ten months have now elapsed. I shall wait for two months more, and then you will have to abide by your fate."

"Before that time," observed Sita firmly," "You will be no more."

At this, Ravan became angry and lifted his sword to kill her, when his queen, Mandodari, who had hitherto stood looking on in silence, intervened and reminded him of a curse made by Nala, years ago, to the effect that if he touched a woman by force, he would die. At this, Ravan fell back.

Presently, Durmukh, Chittakhama, Trijata, Sarama, and other giantesses came to that place. Ravan, having asked them to do their best to turn the mind of Sita, went away.

The giantesses flattered and threatened in turn, but to no purpose. All which Hanuman heard and saw from his hiding place ; and after they had retired, he went to where Sita sat and bowed low.

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Sita at first thought that some companion of Ravan had come to test her. Hanuman sang the praise of Ram and laid Ram's ring at her feet. She now felt convinced that he was no giant, but a companion of her lord.

To him, Sita poured forth her sorrows. She told him that Bibhisan, Ravan's brother, had done his best to induce him to give up his resolution, but to no purpose. She had learnt from the mother of Sananda, daughter of Bibhisan, that, without fight, her release was impossible.

Hanuman offered to carry her away on her back. She told him plainly that she did not wish to touch another person, and it was possible, he, (Hanuman), might abduct her, himself. If he meant her well, he should kill Ravan first and then release her. She asked him to go back and tell her lord that she had not many days to live; and if he wished to save her, he should make haste. At his request, she gave him a diamond which would convince

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Ram that he had really seen her and talked with her.

Hanuman thought that he would not go away without doing some damage to the city. He began by breaking branches of trees and uprooting plants. The giants, who went to stop him, were some beaten and some killed.

Ravan soon heard of Hanuman's doings and ordered a captain, named Jambumali, to arrest him. Jambumali attacked Hanuman, but was defeated and had to retire crestfallen. Prince Aksha next offered to capture Hanuman; but he too was defeated in fight and killed. Ravan then sent Prince Indrajit to capture Hanuman. There was an exchange of hot words between the Prince and the monkey and, presently they came to blows. The Prince was able to capture his opponent. He bound him hand and foot and carried him into the presence of his father.

Ravan asked Hanuman who he was and why he had come. The latter explain-

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ed his mission and added that he (Ravan), his brother Kumbakarna, and Prince Indrajit would be killed by Ram.

At this, Ravan's anger knew no bounds. He ordered his followers to kill Hanuman. Bibhisan intervened and said that it was improper to kill one who was a messenger. It was decided to burn Hanuman's tail and release him.

Hanuman was bound and his tail was set on fire. He, however, managed to secure his release and ran from one house top to another. The result was that the houses were soon ablaze, and within a short time, the city was reduced to ashes. Thousands of giants, giantesses, horses, elephants, and other animals perished in the flames.

Before leaving Lanka, Hanuman visited Sita once more and bade her take courage. He then came to the place where Ram waited in anxious expectation of him. He told his story in full and laid the diamond, which Sita had given him, at his feet.

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Ram praised him for what he had done and embraced him. The joy of his companions knew no bounds. They then began to prepare to cross over to Lanka.

Ravan heard from his spies that Ram was coming to attack him, but he did not feel any anxiety.

Nikasa, too, Ravan's mother, heard of Ram's approach and became afraid. She sent for her son, Bibhisan, and requested him to speak to Ravan about the danger that was impending and ask him to avert it.

Bibhisan was religious-minded and obedient. He called on his brother, pointed out to him the danger that was impending, and urged him to release Sita. But Ravan would not listen to him. He spoke contemptuously of Ram ; and when Bibhisan repeated his request, he lost his temper and kicked him on his breast.

Bibhisan heaved a sigh and told his brother that he was not angry with him for treating him so cruelly. It was natural of people, who had wealth and

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power, to treat others, no sot fortunate as themselves, with contempt. He concluded by saying that after what had occured he would not remain in the house.

Ravan told him that he would not be sorry if he went away. According to the Sastras, he added, it was better to live with a serpent or an enemy than with a relative who had grown hostile. Bibhisan loved his enemy, Ram. So, the sooner he left the place, the better for him.

Bibhisan bowed low and said :—

" Brother, it is evident that your days are numbered. I gave you good advice to which you would not listen. Farewell."

So saying, Bibhisan left the place. Before his departure, he asked his wife, Sarama, to watch Sita and see that no harm came to her.

Bibhisan went to the place where Ram was living. The latter, at first, thought that he was a spy of Ravan ; but his fear was soon dispelled. He made friends with him very shortly.

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The question then arose how they were to reach Lanka. After some consultation, they decided to build a bridge connecting the mainland with Lanka. Within a short time the monkeys built it themselves. Then Ram and his companions crossed over to Lanka. A number of Ravan's soldiers tried to prevent their landing, but were defeated and killed. Thus Ram won his first victory, to the great joy of his companions.

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CHAPTER VI.

RAVAN soon came to hear of Ram's arrival and the defeat of his soldiers. He sent two trusted spies, Sukh and Saran, to make enquiries about his enemy's movements. They came disguised, but were caught by Sugrib, who challenged them to a combat. In the fight, they were beaten. Bibhisan was for killing them, but Ram forbade saying that it was not proper for a king to kill a spy. He then had the spies brought before him and told them that they need not be afraid. They were free to go where they liked, except that he wished them to tell Ravan that he had come to secure Sita's release.

The spies went to their lord and reported what had occurred. They praised Ram and urged Ravan to release Sita. If he did not do so, his death was certain.

Their words made Ravan angry. He answered defiantly saying that he would kill Ram with a single arrow. It was very

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strange that giants should fear men and monkeys. He asked the spies to visit Ram's camp once more, see things with their own eyes, and bring the latest report. They went but were caught by Bibhisan, who wanted to kill them instantly; Ram, however, forbade and told him not to injure them in any way. He then addressed them thus :—

"Go and tell your master that he need not send spies here to make enquiries. He and I shall meet in combat soon. Then I shall kill him and make Bibhisan King of Lanka."

The spies reported to their master what they had been told by Ram, whom they praised very highly. For this they were chastised and turned out of the palace.

Ravan had failed to win the affection of Sita; and now that her husband had come so near, he saw that he had scarcely any chance of winning her. So he hit upon a stratagem. He had a head of a man made up in exact imitation of Ram's, which he threw in front of Sita. By so

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doing he thought she would believe that she had become a widow and might consent to marry him.

When Sita saw the head, she thought it was her lord's and sobbed aloud. Presently she resolved to die.

At this time, Sarama came to her and was questioned whether Ram was no more. She went to the council chamber in disguise and saw Ravan in deep consultation with his ministers. From what she overheard she understood the trick which Ravan had played with Sita.

While Ravan sat making his plan of compaign, his mother came and asked him not to take any rash step. She reminded him of the fate of Khar and Dusana, and the burning of Lanka, and requested him to restore Sita to her lord.

At this Ravan became enraged and ordered her to leave the room at once.

She made another attempt to reason with her son, but his angry looks made her desist and return to her apartments.

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Sarama returned to Sita and reported what she had seen and heard.

Sita heaved a sigh of relief hearing that her Lord was alive, but was filled with sorrow that her release was not possible without fighting.

Ram's spies were also busy. They brought him all information regarding the arrangements made by Ravan for the protection of his city. He also completed his own preparations for the coming battle.

Several days passed away, but Ravan did not stir. Ram felt anxious and, after consulting Bibhisan, decided to send Angada, son of Bali, to Lanka to enquire about Ravan's movements.

In due course, Angada presented himself before Ravan. His massive appearance struck terror among the courtiers some of whom even slipped away on some excuse or other.

On Ravan's enquiry, Angada told him his mission. At which Ravan laughed and said :—

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"Go and tell your master that so long as I live, he will not regain Sita. If he wishes to live, let him leave this place and go away. However, before I permit him to go, he will have to destroy the bridge he has built; Bibhisan must come and beg my forgiveness for his unbrotherly conduct; and Hanuman must be delivered to me, bound hand and foot."

Angada said mockingly :—

"These conditions will be fulfilled, but there is one difficulty. My uncle, Sugriv, has turned Hanuman away."

"How is that?" Ravan enquired.

"My uncle", explained Angada, "has ordered him to cut off the head of Kumbakarna, your brother, and bring it to him; destroy Lanka completely, and take you to his presence, seizing your hair. He has not carried out any of these orders, so he has been turned away. I do not know where he is now. We are working for him everywhere."

These words made the assembled giants afraid, and they looked at one ano-

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ther meaningly. Then Angada grew bolder and said :—

"Consider, Ravan, your death at Ram's hands is certain. I advise you to distribute all your wealth among the poor and the needy. Fulfil your last desires now. Put on your best apparel, and prepare for death. You are well versed in the sastras, and it is a pity that you do not know Ram and his prowess. There is yet some hope for you ; carry Sita to Ram's presence without delay and beg his forgiveness for your fault. So he may be pleased to overlook it."

"Do not concern yourself with me," said Ravan roughly. "I know my duty, and I do not want your advice."

At this, Angada lost his temper and told Ravan to his face :—

"Your prowess is already known. Everybody knows how my father chastised you, years ago, and how you saved yourself. Do not boast in vain."

"Leave my presence immediately," Ravan ordered in anger. "Were you not

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an envoy, I would have killed you this moment. Go."

"I will," said Angada. "But do not forget with whom you are going to wage war. I do not care a straw for you. I can fell you with a single blow. Your days are numbered. Be prepared."

Ravan ordered his courtiers to arrest Angada. The latter turned round and said he was the son of Bali and afraid of no man. The courtiers attempted to seize him, but failed. Angada left the man and sat on a wall. There he thought he would take away to his Lord some sign of his visit to Ravan. He decided to take away Ravan's crown. He did not hesitate a moment but fell upon Ravan, threw him down, and ran away with his crown.

Ram was delighted to have the crown and embraced Angada. He then enquired how he had managed to secure it.

Angada told his story. Ram said that he was highly pleased with him and would confer high honours upon him.

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Now, Ravan was not prepared to brook the insult, which Angada had heaped upon him. He ordered his army to march out and punish the enemy. His son, Indrajit, took the command.

The two armies met on the field of battle. A fierce fight ensued, and thousands on both sides were killed and wounded. Indrajit happened to see Ram and Laksman and showered arrows upon them so thick and fast that they both fell severely wounded. At this he was filled with joy and hurried to his father to report his victory.

Ravan asked Trijata to tell Sita what had happened, believing that she would become frightened and offer to marry him.

Trijata hurried to carry out her master's order. When Sita heard what had happened, she was filled with sorrow; but she told her that whatever might happen to her Lord, she would be true to him to the last.

Ravan heard this, but did not give up hope of winning Sita's affection.

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Ram and Laksman, however, recovered very quickly, to the great joy of their followers.

Another engagement took place shortly after. In it, Hanuman exhibited his prowess and was able to defeat and slay Durmukh, one of Ravan's Generals.

When Ravan heard of it, he sent Akampan, another General, to fight with Ram. He too was defeated and slain by Hanuman.

Then came Bajradanstra, who also laid low.

Ravan next sent Prahasta, his uncle, but none was able to slay him after a fierce combat.

The frequent reverses and the death of so many Generals made Ravan very anxious. He decided to take command himself. One day, he went to the field of battle in great state.

The two armies soon came into collision, Ravan discharged an arrow, which fell on Sugriv's breast and made him reel and fall to the ground. At this,

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his army wavered and was about to turn tail, when Ram took up his bow to fight the enemy. Laksman would not allow him to do so and begged to be allowed to engage with Ravan. Hanuman intervened and prayed that he might be granted the favour of fighting with the enemy. His request was granted. He jumped upon Ravan's chariot. Ravan saw his old enemy and was about to raise his bow to discharge an arrow, when Hanuman dealt him a blow with his hand, which made him reel and fall. The latter soon got up and returned Hanuman's blow so that he fell down. He then attacked Neel, but was not able to injure him for some time. But, at a favourable moment, he managed to wound him severely. Laksman next took the field. A fierce battle ensured, in which Ravan proved victorious. Laksman was dangerously wounded and captured. Ravan tried to carry him away, but Hanuman was able to snatch him from his grasp. Ram himself now took the field and fought with Ravan bravely. The

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latter could not stand his charge and fled to the city in confusion.

Ravan's brother, Kumbhakarna, was a mighty warrior and believed to be invincible in war. Unfortunately, for some offence, he had been cursed by Bramha so that he passed most of his time in sleep.

At this time, Kumbhakarna was sleeping. Ravan's followers were able, with great difficulty, to rouse him from his sleep. Opening his eyes he enquired why he had been awakened untimely. As nobody gave any reply, he went to his brother for an explanation. He learnt everything and understood that it was to save his brother's honour that he had been awakened. He bade him take courage and promised to rid him of his enemies. He speadily armed himself and went to the field of battle. At the sight of him, the army of Ram was terror-stricken. His Generals, Neel, Hanuman, and Sugrib, however, met Kumbhakarna, only to be severely wounded. Sugrib was captured and carried off to Lanka in triumph.

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Hanuman could not brook this outrage. He called on his soldiers to follow him, but they dared not respond to his call. Sugrib was not, however, frightened. At a favourable opportunity, he not only managed to run away, but tore off the ears of Kumbhakarna, with which he came back to the camp of Ram, to whom he presented them.

Kumbhakarna, ashamed at the outrage that had been committed upon him, ran to fight with his enemies. He first met Laksman, with whom he exchanged hot words. He then challenged Ram to meet him in single combat. Ram accepted the challenge. Presently the two warriors were engaged in a fierce struggle. After a long time, Ram proved victorious and slew his enemy—to the great joy of his companions.

In due course, Ravan heard of his brother's death. Filled with sorrow, he wept, for a long time, like a child. His subjects too were grief stricken and it was

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felt that the destruction of Lanka was at hand.

The death of Kumbhakarna made Trisira, Tebantatta, Narantaka, and Atikaya, four sons of Ravan, determined to exterminate the enemy. But they met with no success, and were killed in fight. They were followed by his brothers, Mahodar and Mahipas, who also were slain.

When Ravan heard this news, he sobbed aloud. He filled the air with lamentation and beat his forehead. His ministers tried to cheer him, but without avail.

Indrajit presently came to his father and begged permission to go to the field. It was readily granted.

Indrajit first performed a yagna (sacrifice) and, then, having saluted his parents, went to the field of battle. He fought very bravely and killed many of his enemies. He challenged the famous warriors in the other camp and laid them low one after another. He then returned to Lanka and communicated the news of success to his parents and great was their delight. There

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were great rejoicings in the capital and feasts were indulged in everywhere. Ravan presented Indrajit with all he possessed, save his throne.

Now, Bikhisan and Hanuman enjoyed the gift of immortality. They took counsel and decided that Hanuman should go to Rishyamukha and fetch "Bisalyakarani," "Mrityusanjibani," "Asthisancharini," and "Subarnakarani"—four kinds of medicines possessing miraculous powers. Hanuman hastened to procure them. When these were applied to the bodies of Ram, Laksman, and other warriors, who had fallen in the battle, they all recovered and became again perfectly well.

The spies of Ram soon brought news that the gates of Lanka were closed, so that no entrance could be obtained to ascertain the latest movement of Ravan. Hanuman was ordered by Ram to set fire to the city. Accompanied by a trusty body of followers, Hanuman scaled the walls of the city and carried out his Lord's order.

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Ravan, unable to endure this fresh outrage, sent for Kumbha and Vikumbha, two sons of Kumbhakarna, and ordered them to fight his enemies. They forthwith attacked the army of Ram; but though they fought with extreme valour, they were defeated and slain by Hanuman.

At Ravan's orders, Makarakhya, a valiant warrior next appeared on the field, but he too was defeated and killed.

Ravan then sent for Taranisen, son of Bikhisan, and ordered him to fight his enemy, Taranisen fought with the utmost bravery, but was overpowered and slain by Ram himself.

After this, Ravan sent his son Birbahn and two of his generals, Dhumrakha and Vasmalschan; but they too were defeated and killed in the fight.

These successive defeats fell as thunderbolts on Ravan and all but killed him. There remained only two warriors to take the field—Ravan himself and Indrajit.

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For some time, he mourned the loss he had suffered. Gradually he came to himself and sent for Indrajit and ordered him to take the field.

A fierce battle soon ensued between the armies of Indrajit and Ram. At one time, it seemed as if Indrajit would prove victorious ; but, at length, he suffered a signal defeat and was killed. A panic seized his army, which fled away in confusion, pursued by the soldiers of Ram. The terror of the latter was gone and their joy was boundless, to which they lost no time in giving expression in various ways.

When news was brought to Ravan of Indrajits' fall, he was stricken down with grief. He filled the air with lamentations and rolled from side to side on the floor. When he had somewhat recovered composure, Ravan decided to take the field himself. He engaged Laksman in single combat and felled him with his "Saktisela". To revive him, Hanuman went to the Gandhamadan hill to procure "Bisalyakarani" a medicine possessing miracu-

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lous powers. Ravan tried to prevent him from accomplishing his errand; but the latter overcame all obstacles and returned with the medicine, by applying which Laksman became hale and hearty again.

When Ravan heard the news, he felt that his days were numbered. His mother, Nikasa, reminded him that he had yet a son left, named Mahiravan, who might be of assistance to him in his present danger. Ravan sent for him and ordered him to fight Ram. Mahiravan knew sorcery well. By this knowledge, he stole away Ram and Lakshman and hid them somewhere. At their sudden disappearance, their companions were filled with anxiety. Bibhisan knew the powers of Mahiravan. He told his friends that Mahiravan must have secreted Ram and Laksman somewhere. Hanuman offered to trace their whereabouts. After seeking high and low, he was, at last, able to find out the place where the two brothers had been confined and managed to release them and to kill Mahiravan.

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Ravan's hopes were now almost gone. He had no alternative, but to appear on the field in person, so, having armed himself and mounted his chariot, he came to the battlefield.

Presently Ram and Ravan met. A fierce fight ensued between them. For a long time, it continued with unabated fury, without either of them gaining an advantage.

Ravan, however, felt that his chance of success was small. So he offered a puja to goddess, Ambica, and secured from her the boon he desired. Ram also offered a puja to goddess Chandi. She was highly pleased with him and promised to help him and to leave Ravan.* Thus armed, Ram felt sure of success.

When Ravan and Ram next met in combat, the latter was soon able to lay the former low. Finding that Ravan had not many hours to live, Ram came to him and

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* It was Ram, who started the Durga puja in autumn. It is the greatest of Hindu pujahs and lasts for four days.

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requested him to advise on governing a Kingdom, successfully.

Ravan, with all humility, begged Ram's forgiveness and gave him much good counsel, to which he listened alternatively.

Ravan had many things to say, but he could not tell them all, for he gradually lost his power of speech and, after a while breathed his last.

In due course, Ravan's sradh was performed ceremoniously. Then Ram made Bibhisan King of Lanka. Various festivities were held on the occasion, in which man, monkey, and giant freely took part.

Hanuman had already informed Sita of the death of her enemy. After the ceremonies in connection with the investiture of Bibhisan were over, it was decided to bring her to her Lord.

One day, Bibhisan and others brought Sita to the presence of Ram. Everybody, who saw her, was filled with joy and sang her praise. She bowed low to her husband and waited his command.

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It had, however, already been whispered that Ram ought not to take her to his palace without first satisfying himself about her purity. He heard these whispers and was pained. So when she stood before him, he addressed her thus :—

" You see, I cannot take you with me. I do not know how you passed the last few months. You can go and live in the house of any of my followers here or of my brothers. I was in duty bound to secure your release. I have done."

These harsh words filled her eyes with tears. She folded her hands and said gently :—

" My Lord, I am the daughter of King Janaka. Dasaratha is my father-in-law, and you are my husband. You know my character well. So why do you punish me thus? I have never touched any man in my life. Why do you think that I am an evil woman? Why did you take so much trouble to secure my release ?"

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She then turned to Laksman and said:—

"Light a fire. I shall enter it and show that no blame can be attached to me."

With Ram's permission, Laksman lighted a fire, Sita went round it three times and entered it slowly. When she came out, everybody was surprised to see that she was not turned or injured in any way. No doubt remained in any body's mind that she was chaste and pure.

Ram had now fulfilled the promise he had made to his father. So, on an auspicious day, accompanied by Sita, Laksman, Sugrib, Hanuman, Bibhisan, and thousands of other followers, he left for home.

Hanuman went to Nandigram and informed Bhart of Ram's home-coming. This news filled him with joy and, putting his brother's sandals on his head, and accompanied by Satrughna and a large number of courtiers, he went to receive his brother.

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The meeting of the four brothers was most touching. They embraced one another and shed tears of joy. After making the usual enquiries about health and family matters, they went home to pay respect to their mothers.

Kaikaye had heard of Ram's return, but was not sure how he would treat her. He never bore her any ill-will and, after saluting his own mother, went to pay her his respects. Kaikaye and Ram talked freely as of old and, after some time he returned to his place.

Later, Ram was invested King of Ayodhya, amidst much pomp and ceremony. Feastings and merry-makings continued for several days.

Ram's happiness was now complete. He began to reign peacefully. His land flowed with peace and plenty, and his subjects were happy and contented.

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CHAPTER VII

AFTER Ram had ruled for sometime, he bethought him to build a golden "Asokeban" near Ayodhya. It was built as he wished. Ram took Sita there and passed his days happily.

One day, Ram came to his palace on business and overheard some of his courtiers remarking that he should not have brought Sita home.

Ram was pained to hear this. He did not say anything, however, to anybody. When holding court, one day, he suddenly asked:

"Will any of you tell me how my subjects are passing their days?"

No one dared give a reply. But a courtier, bolder than the rest, got up and, with folded hands, said:

"They are not happy and are becoming poor,"

"How's that?" questioned Ram in surprise.

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"Wherever I go, replied the courtier, "I hear Sita's forced stay in Ravan's palace being discussed. Everybody says that it was not proper for you to bring her back without first satisfying yourself about her purity, when she was confined in Ravan's palace."

These words fell on Ram like a thunder-bolt. For a while he sat stunned, but, gradually, recovering himself, he questioned his other courtiers whether or not this statement was true. They admitted that it was true.

Ram sent for his brothers and told them that he had decided to banish Sita. At this, they were filled with surprise and tried to reason with him.

Ram said that it was his subjects' will that Sita should not remain in the palace. He was perfectly sure that she was true to him ; but he could not over-ride their will. He then asked Laksman to take her to the hermitage of Balmiki, to which, a day or two previously, she had expressed a wish to go. This would be a fine opportunity to

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exile her without exciting any suspicion in her mind.

Laksman went to the inner apartments and spoke to Sita about the visit, but did not disclose her Lord's real intention. She did not suspect anything wrong, and entered the chariot which had been brought for her.

As the chariot approached the hermitage, Laksman's anguish increased. When it was already near, he could not restrain himself but burst into tears. In surprise, Sita asked what had happened. He confessed everthing frankly, and, leaving her there, went away with a heavy heart.

Sita began to cry aloud. Her cry attracted the attention of Balmiki and his pupils, who hurried up and, at once, recognised her. Balmiki took her to his hermitage with many marks of respect, and placed her in charge of his wife, who took every care of her and supplied all her wants.

Though Ram had exiled Sita, he could not suffer the pangs of separation from

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her. At his order, a golden image of Sita was built, and he would pass his time gazing at it. His courtiers urged him to marry again. But he refused to listen to them, saying that Sita was his all in all.

One day, the hermit, Bhargava came to see Ram and complained that a giant, named Labana, was disturbing the inhabitants of Mathura and others, in various ways, and requested that he might be destroyed.

Saturghna prayed that he might be entrusted with the task of killing the giant. Ram granted his request. Satrughna saluted his brother and, taking with him an immense army, went to fulfil his mission.

Labana was a valiant warrior. When he heard that Satrughna had come to kill him, he invited him to a combat. The fight lasted for a long time; but, in the end, Labana was defeated and killed—to the great joy of those whom he had oppressed.

Satrughna then set himself up as king of the country and began to rule wisely. People from distant lands were attracted,

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and began to settle in his dominion, which overflowed with peace and plenty.

After reigning for twelve years he went to Ayodhya to pay his respects to his eldest brother. On his way, he stopped at the hermitage of Balmiki, who received him cordially.

While he rested, he heard Ramayana being sung at the hermitage. The story of Ram's exile filled his eyes with tears and he enquired who the singers were. He learnt that they were two hermit boys, who were singing to accompaniment of Bina.

Satrughna reached Ayodhya in due course, and saluted his brothers. Ram praised him for ridding Mathura of Labana and for his good government of the country. He then asked him to go back to Mathura and continue to govern it. Satrughna stopped at Ayodhya for some time and then returned to Mathura.

Ram continued to govern Ayodhya wisely. No body had ever any complaint

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to make, and peace and contentment reigned everywhere.

One day, a Brahman came to Ram's palace, carrying a dead child. Ram enquired what had happened. The Brahman complained that his son had died untimely. This was undoubtedly due to some sin on the ruler's part. Enquiries were made and it was learnt that a Sudra had become a hermit and was performing "tapasya." According to the sastras, a Brahman alone could perform "tapasya" in the Satyajuga; in the Tretajuga, Kshatriya also was entitled to perform it ; in Dwaparjuga, a Vaishya might perform "tapasya" ; and in Kalijuga only, a Sudra could do the same. So the Sudra, who was performing "Tapasya", had no right to do so. The duty of the king was to prevent him from doing "Tapasya". As Ram had not done so, he had sinned; and as a result of that sin, that unusual event—the untimely death of the Brahman child—had occurred. Ram found out the Sudra hermit and cut off his head.

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On his way home, Ram decided to pay his respects to the sage Agastya. From his hermitage, he returned to his palace.

One day, he sent for his brothers and told them that he had decided to perform "Rajasuya jagna". They requested him not to perform it, as these kings, who had performed it before, had suffered various privations. It was decided to perform "Aswamedhajagna" instead.

The necessary arrangements were duly made. To witness the "jagna," various princes from different parts of Varatbarsa came to Ayodhya, Bibhisan, Sugriv, Angada, and Hanuman, with their followers also arrived. Hundreds of Rishis and Brahmans took charge of the "jagna" and began to perform it with due ceremony.

At the appointed time, the horse which plays an important part in the ceremony, was let loose. Satrughna, with a large retinue, followed it to see that it was not molested. It roamed from place to place. Two or three princes tried to stop

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it, but were severely punished by Satrughna. At last it came to the hermitage of Balmiki.

Now, when Sita was exiled, she was five months pregnant. In due course, she gave birth to two boys. Balmiki named them Lav and Kusa. He reared them in his hermitage and taught them all arts and sciences, but he did not tell them who their father was. He also taught them to sing the Ramayana. They would sing the story of Ram so beautifully that everybody was charmed. They were engaged in play, when the horse came near. They caught hold of it to a tree.

When the horse became necessary for the completion of the sacrifice, Ram ordered it to be brought. He was surprised to learn that it had been caught. Satrughna went to Balmiki's hermitage and saw the boys playing with it. When he asked them to return the horse, he was laughed at and questioned who he was. He answered their questions fully. At this, they said that they would not let it go and challenged him to snatch it away from

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them. From words they soon came to blows. Satrughna was defeated in the fight and was severely wounded.

When Ram heard this news, his heart was filled with anguish, Bharat and Laksman offered to bring back the horse. They went fully armed and accompanied by a large number of soldiers. Lav and Kush met them in single combat and defeated them also.

This news filled Ram's heart with sorrow. He consulted his ministers and others and, accompanied by Sugriv, Angada, and thousands of soldiers, went to the hermitage of Balmiki.

Everybody was surprised to see the striking resemblance of the two boys to Ram. The charioteer, who had brought Sita, to the hermitage, said that he had an idea that the boys were the children of Sita.

Ram asked them gently :—

" Who are you ? What is the name of your father ? I think that you are my own children. I shall not fight with you with-

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out first satisfying myself about your parentage."

"We do not know our father's name," they replied. "But why do you not fight with us ? Clearly you are afraid of us, and so you ask question."

Hearing this, Ram did not say more, but ordered his men to get ready. Presently he began to fight. At one time, Ram seemed to get the upper hand, the boys at another. Soon the latter fled away, leaving Ram victorious. But they returned shortly after and resumed fighting. They wounded Ram severely and took away his arms and personal ornaments, with which they joyfully ran to their mother and laid them at her feat in triumph. They told her all that they had done. She recognised the ornaments as those of her Lord and began to cry.

In surprise, the boys asked her:—

"Who is this Ram, mother ?"

"Your father," she replied sobbing, "What have you done ? You have killed

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your father and uncles. Alas! Alas!!" and she ran to the spot where Ram lay writhing in agony. She wept aloud when she saw his condition, and rebuked the boys for what they had done.

The boys said that she ought to have told them who their father was. Then this disaster had not come upon them. They added that, since these things had happened, they would not keep their lives. Sita said that she also would commit suicide.

Sita and her boys soon went to the bank of the Jamuna and lighted a fire. They bathed and put on fresh clothes, and were about to enter the fire when Balmiki, who had come to know by his power of divination, what they were going to do, appeared on the scene and asked them not to carry out their intention.

Sita told him that she would not live unless her lord and his brothers received back their lives.

Balmiki took them to his hermitage and applied "mritunjaya" water to the

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bodies of Ram and his brothers, and their soldiers, who had fallen in the battle. They all bacame perfectly well soon after.

Seeing Balmiki, Ram bowed low and enquired who the two boys were. Balmiki said that he would not say anything now and asked him to take the horse away and complete his sacrifice first.

Then, one day, Balmiki presented himself before Ram. He had Lav and Kush with him. He ordered them to sing the Ramayana. They sang it so beautifully that everybody was charmed. Ram offered many valuable presents, but they would not accept them.

Ram asked the boys who their father was. They said they did not know. Their mother's name was Sita and they were the pupils of Balmiki.

All his doubts were now removed. He understood that they were his own children. He took them on his lap and began to shed tears. When he was tranquil again, he requested Balmimi to bring Sita after testing her purity. Kausalya, Kaikaye, and

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Sumitra heard this and told Ram not to test Sita again. He had already tested her once, and a further test was unnecessary. Ram said that if he did not test her, he would be blamed by his subjects.

Sita was brought to the palace with befitting honours and told what Ram had ordered. She heaved a sigh and said that she had already been tested, she had no longer any desire for earthly pleasures, and would give up her life. She prayed to mother Earth to take her into her bosom. Her prayer was heard. For shortly after, a golden chariot appeared near the place where she stood. She had hardly taken her seat on it, when it entered the nether world. On her disappearance, everybody began to lament. The piteous wail of the two boys affected all. For a while, nobody could console them. After sometime, their grief subsided, but Ram never ceased to mourn the heavy loss he had sustained.

Years passed away. The old queens, Kausalya, Kaikaye, and Sumitra were gathered to their fathers. Many other

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queens of King Dasaratha also died. Then Ram decided to invest his boys and the children of his brothers as kings of some of the countries under his sway.

Chandraketu and Angada, two sons of Laksman, were made rulers of Malldesa and Aswadesa respectively. The two sons of Satrughna became rulers of Mathura. Lav and Kush were made Kings of Ayodhya and Nandigram, while the two sons of Bharat became Kings of the country of Gandarvas.

Many years passed away. Peace and plenty reigned supreme everywhere. The subjects were contented, and the hermits performed their religious rites without fear of molestation from giants or other wicked creatures.

Gradually Ram became disgusted with this world and determined to retire. His brothers learnt of his intention and said they would do the same.

Bibhisan, Sugriv, Hanuman and other friends of Ram heard of his resolve and hurried to Ayodhya to pay their last res-

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pects to him. They all insisted upon following him but were prevailed upon to go back.

One day, Ram invested his boys sovereigns of all his possessions and, accompanied by his brothers, and a large number of ascetics, hermits, and others, went to the bank of the river Saraju, and there gave up the ghost. His brothers also breathed their last, shortly after.

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CHAPTER VIII.

RAM was an ideal son, an ideal brother, an ideal husband, and an ideal King. The like of him was never born on this earth—perhaps, will never be born. Though dead, hundreds of years ago, his name is still cherished by millions of Hindus. Ayodhya, his capital, is not what it was in his days; but it is a place of pilgrimage, which is visited by thousands, from different parts of India, every year. The Hindus believe that, by taking his name, they will be absolved from all sins.

To Hindus, Sita is a model wife. She is one of the five "daughters" whose names are uttered by all pious Hindus on leaving their beds every morning. The Hindu mother blesses her daughter saying, "May you be like Sita"—that is, be as chaste and virtuous as she was.

Hanuman was an ideal devotee and an ideal friend. He stood by Ram in weal and woe. He never expected any reward

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